

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HISTORIC CONSERVATION BOARD

MONDAY, September 9, 2002

3:00 P.M., J. MARTIN GRIESEL ROOM, CENTENNIAL PLAZA II

The Historic Conservation Board met at 3:00 P.M., in the J. Martin Griesel Room, Centennial Plaza II, with members, Bloomfield, Borys, Clement, Kreider, Raser, Senhauser, Sullebarger, and Wallace present. Absent: Spraul-Schmidt.

MINUTES

The minutes of the Monday, August 26, 2002 meeting were approved (motion by Clement second by Wallace).

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS, 415 ELIZABETH STREET, BETTS-LONGWORTH HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Adrienne Cowden presented the staff report on this request to retain glass block infill in the main façade basement windows of the residence at 415 Elizabeth Street. The residence is located in the Betts-Longworth Local Historic District and is part of the Longworth Square Planned Unit Development (PUD) project, managed by Model Management, Inc.

-- Mr. Senhauser joined the meeting --

Ms. Cowden stated that the Historic Conservation Board reviewed the PUD project between 1988 and 1992, which involved the demolition of 13 historic structures and the construction of the townhouses. When the Board reviewed the PUD, they discussed size and placement of windows as part of the overall design of the front facades. She added that the condo association covenants do not address windows.

Ms. Shirley Poe of Model Management, Inc. attended the pre-hearing that was held on September 3, 2002 to inquire about the historic review process. No other persons attended the pre-hearing; however, staff received additional communication regarding the glass block. On August 30, 2002, Gary D. Gagle of 403 Elizabeth Street contacted staff and expressed his strong support of the glass block and stated he would like to install glass block in the basement windows of his home. Owner Rita McLaughlin delivered eight letters of support for the work to staff on September 4, 2002. On Friday, September 6, 2002, Jim Metler of 405 Elizabeth Street expressed his disapproval of the glass block stating he would like to see the original windows re-installed.

Ms. Cowden explained that the Betts-Longworth historic guidelines indicate that placement and type of windows in new construction should be compatible with the district. She stated that staff feels the glass block is not sympathetic or compatible, particularly with its placement on the main façade. She noted that in some new construction within the historic district, glass block can be found, but is primarily smaller block and limited to the foundation, where plants obscure its visibility. In addition, it is unclear if it was installed originally or as a later alteration.

In response to Ms. Wallace, Ms. Cowden confirmed that Mr. Metler, of 405 Elizabeth Street has indicated his objection to the glass block and that Figure 5 of the staff

report depicts 504 Elizabeth Street, not 405 Elizabeth, as captioned. Mr. Raser questioned whether the applicant was aware of alternatives to glass block. Ms. Cowden replied that she had discussed options with the applicant, including exterior and interior metal grilles. She confirmed that she had referred to Lexan in the staff report, but did not discuss that option with the applicant.

Owners Rita McLaughlin and Thomas Merkle were present to respond to questions from the Board. Ms. McLaughlin and Mr. Merkel emphasized that the glass block was installed as a preemptive measure to ensure security. They chose it over grilles, believing grilles communicated a more negative message and would not be as effective as a deterrent. Ms. Sullebarger explained that the Board would prefer metal grilles because they have been used historically on basement level openings. She observed that there are alternative ways to address security, including sensors. Ms. McLaughlin stated they did not consider sensors on the lower level, since they could not respond quickly enough when on the third floor. She questioned if larger plantings could be considered to conceal the glass block. The applicants also stated that security was a particular problem on the street side. While the rear of the complex is not gated, they believe neighbors' activity make it a less likely place for illegal entry.

Mr. Raser questioned if the applicant was willing to consider any alternatives to the glass block. The applicants indicated a willingness to look at options, but stated that they did not include the bottom floor in their security system, believing glass block would better address security there and they chose it because they felt it was the best option.

Mr. Senhauser noted that when the Board reviewed the PUD, it was the developer's desire to create viable living space on the lower level. The window openings were a negotiated part of the design. While the glass block provides a degree of security, it also sends a message of being afraid.

Mr. Metler addressed the Board stating his opposition to the windows, primarily because of their appearance. Mr. Metler described options he had investigated to glass block including: sound detectors, motion detectors, and laminated glass withstanding from 100 to 500 lbs of force. He also commented that he felt the back area was not lit well and felt it was a more likely area for forced entry than the front. He added that from outside, an interior grille looks more like window treatment – almost like vertical blinds.

Mr. Kreider questioned if the Homeowner's Association had taken a position on the glass block. Mr. Metler stated that he was on the board two to three years ago when a homeowner wanted to put in glass block and it was denied. Mr. Krieder questioned how the private covenants address the issue. Ms. Poe from Model Management stated that it is not addressed specifically; however, if one wants to change the front of a unit, they have to submit a change to the board. She said the applicants did not submit a request for a change, so the board did not have the opportunity to discuss it. At a recent meeting when glass block was discussed (with seven of the 60 homeowners present) four or five were in favor of glass block.

Mr. Raser suggested the possibility of tabling the item to give the applicants an opportunity to review alternatives. Ms. Sullebarger pointed out that the staff recommendation does not preclude working with the applicant on options. Mr.

Senhauser suggested that tabling the item might not accomplish anything, except delaying the applicant a chance to appeal, if they chose.

Mr. Kreider acknowledged that it was not the applicant's intent to make their home a fortress, but pointed out that glass block gives that impression. He commented that homeowners should not be forced to live within a fortress or move to the suburbs and that individuals should get proactive with the police and demand that they get out of the district office and onto the streets.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Borys, second by Clement) to take the following actions:

1. Find that the basement windows may be secured by means other than glass block including, but not limited to, motion sensors, Lexan, safety glass, and/or interior or exterior metal grilles;
2. Deny a Certificate of Appropriateness for the glass block installed in the basement windows on the main (north) facade of 415 Elizabeth Street and so notify the Department of Buildings and Inspections; and
3. Approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation of new sash that matches the original in appearance.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS 1206 MAIN STREET, OVER-THE-RHINE (SOUTH) HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Caroline Kellam presented the staff report for the installation of a neon sign as a replacement to an existing deteriorated wood sign for Diva's on Main, located at 1206 Main Street in the Over-the-Rhine (South) Historic District.

Ms. Kellam stated that the Board approved the existing wood sign in 2000. She described the proposed sign as being the same size and design as the existing sign. The text and "swoosh" would be done in exposed neon tubing on a painted metal background. The 3 ½" thick sign would have incandescent light bulbs along the edge of the circular sign. In order to keep the thickness of the sign minimal, one or two 8" x 8" x 14" metal transformers would also have to be installed under the fire escape on the front elevation.

Ms. Kellam acknowledged that neon is seen in the district, but it is primarily on signs mounted on the interior, behind storefront windows. Exterior neon signs are also seen, but most pre-date the designation of the historic district. She stated that internally illuminated signs are discouraged in most historical districts in the City.

Mr. Bloomfield suggested looking at the proposed sign from two perspectives, one addressing the incandescent bulbs and second, discussing the appropriateness of neon. He pointed out that the proposed incandescent bulbs would not necessarily be non-historic. Ms. Kellam responded to Ms. Sullebarger that the staff recommendation is to match the existing sign so one would have to amend the recommendation to allow the incandescent bulbs to remain. Mr. Bloomfield suggested it might be appropriate to table the item to allow the applicant to look at alternatives to neon and added that he would like to see an alternative sign, possibly utilizing incandescent bulbs. Ms. Kellam replied to Ms. Clement that floodlights currently light the sign.

Applicant Bob Carpenter of Carpenter Sign Service was present to respond to questions from the Board. Mr. Carpenter distributed pictures taken of neon signs within a ½ block radius of Diva's. He said that, with so much neon visible in the vicinity, he could not see how this sign could negatively impact the neighborhood. He explained that the owner's intent is to be noticed, even after-hours when the shop is closed. In response to Ms. Sullebarger, Mr. Carpenter explained that incandescent bulbs alone are not adequate to illuminate a sign and would be primarily decorative, acknowledging that spotlights could externally light it.

Ms. Clement and Ms. Borys concurred that they would prefer to see the neon sign behind the window and explained to the applicant that the Board would not have to review the sign if it was installed in an interior window.

Mr. Kreider read the paragraph from the applicable guidelines that addresses signs:

Signs should be designed for clarity, legibility and compatibility with the building or property on which they are located. Signs should be located above the storefront, on the storefront windows or on awnings and should not cover any architectural features. Signs should capitalize on the special character of the building and reflect the nature of the business. Small projecting signs such as symbol signs are appropriate. Billboards, standardized internally illuminated signs and temporary illuminated signs are not permitted.

He noted that the guidelines have some flexibility. They do not prohibit all internally lit signs. If the sign is appropriately located, of a proper size and style, fits in architecturally and reflects the nature of the business and is not a standard sign, it could be considered appropriate. He concluded that the proposed sign is an internally illuminated sign, but it is not standardized.

Mr. Forwood confirmed for Mr. Senhauser that no one from the community attend the pre-hearing and staff has received no communication regarding the sign.

Mr. Senhauser commented that historically, in this neighborhood, there has been a proliferation of large signs. He suggested that if Main Street is to continue as a viable entertainment district, use of neon in this instance could be appropriate in contributing to the liveliness of the street.

After the Board and applicant discussing details of the transformer box and cables, including the size and location, and number required, Mr. Carpenter suggested the best alternative would be thicken the sign and mount the transformer inside. He said that if he used a solid-state electronic transformer, he could keep the thickness of the sign to 4 ½". There was consensus of the Board that this was an amenable solution.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Sullebarger, second by Kreider) to take the following actions:

1. Find that the proposed sign is a non-standardized, internally illuminated sign; and
2. Grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed sign with the following conditions:
 - a. That the sign does not exceed 4 ½ " in thickness;
 - b. That the transformer be an electronic solid-state transformer; and

- c. That the final sign drawings should be reviewed and approved by the Urban Conservator prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness and building permit.

-- Mr. Bloomfield and Ms. Borys left the meeting. --

ADDITIONAL ITEM

Mr. Kreider informed the Board that residents of East Walnut Hills had brought a concern to his attention. The owner of 1886 Madison Road has been working on a porch project for over two years and is not nearing completion. The neighborhood feels it is the Department of Buildings and Inspections responsibility to address the issue, ensuring that necessary permits have been obtained and minimum maintenance requirements met.

Urban Conservator Forwood responded that he had spoken with the local building inspector over the last year about this and several similar projects under way in the district. Mr. Forwood was uncertain whether the most recent conversation was about this particular residence, but acknowledged that work was proceeding slowly under a repair permit two years ago. He added that the building inspector had been in communication with the owner regarding the repairs.

ADJOURNMENT

As there were no other items for consideration by the Board, the meeting adjourned.

William L. Forwood
Urban Conservator

John C. Senhauser
Chairman

Date